

Thirteenth Judicial District Court
State of Montana

SENATE JUDICIAL
CASE NO. 2
DATE 4/4/13
FILE SJ22

Mary Jane Knisely
District Judge—Department 6



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April 3, 2013,

Dear Montana Legislators,

It is with pleasure that I submit this letter in support of Senate Joint Resolution No. 22 requesting a study to evaluate current court procedures in family law cases. As one of six District Court Judges in Yellowstone County, I have the privilege of presiding in of the busiest Districts in the State. The Thirteenth Judicial District received over 2,000 Domestic Relations filings in 2012. This growing volume coupled with the number of self-represented litigants, lacking the experience to navigate lengthy discovery procedures and court hearings, consistently creates many obstacles to efficient case processing. The resulting judicial backlog generates delays and limits all of the publics' access to the court system.

I believe family law cases are some of the most important work a judge handles, and thus deserve judicial resources. Through utilizing education, early intervention measures and dispute resolution programs, Montana parents and children would likewise benefit from the innovations successfully implemented in courts across the country.

I respectfully request you assign this important matter to an interim committee to research and study alternatives to the traditional adversarial family law docket. There is a great need to create an environment supporting judges in their efforts to spearhead efficient, positive outcomes for families.

My Best,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Mary Jane Knisely". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Hon. Mary Jane Knisely